

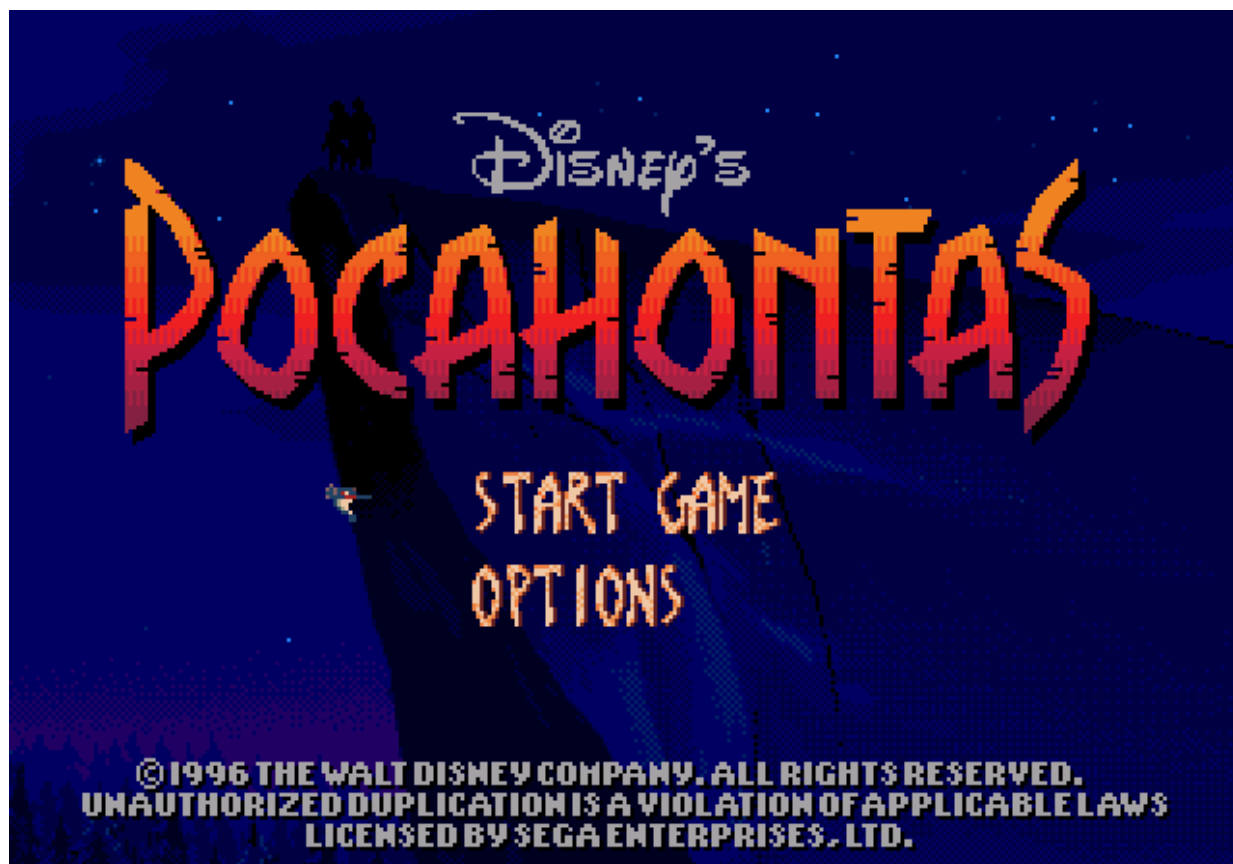
# **Worst feature - nothing dies**

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

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That's a comment taken from a roundtable discussion published in Electronic Gaming Monthly issue 80 in March 1996 concerning the gaming interpretation of Disney's Pocahontas for the SEGA Mega Drive. 'Sushi-X' goes on to say, "I'm not a freak, but I *did* think the movie was decent and I enjoyed the game to a certain extent."



I didn't think not being a freak precluded one's enjoyment of Pocahontas, but there you go, now I've been educated.



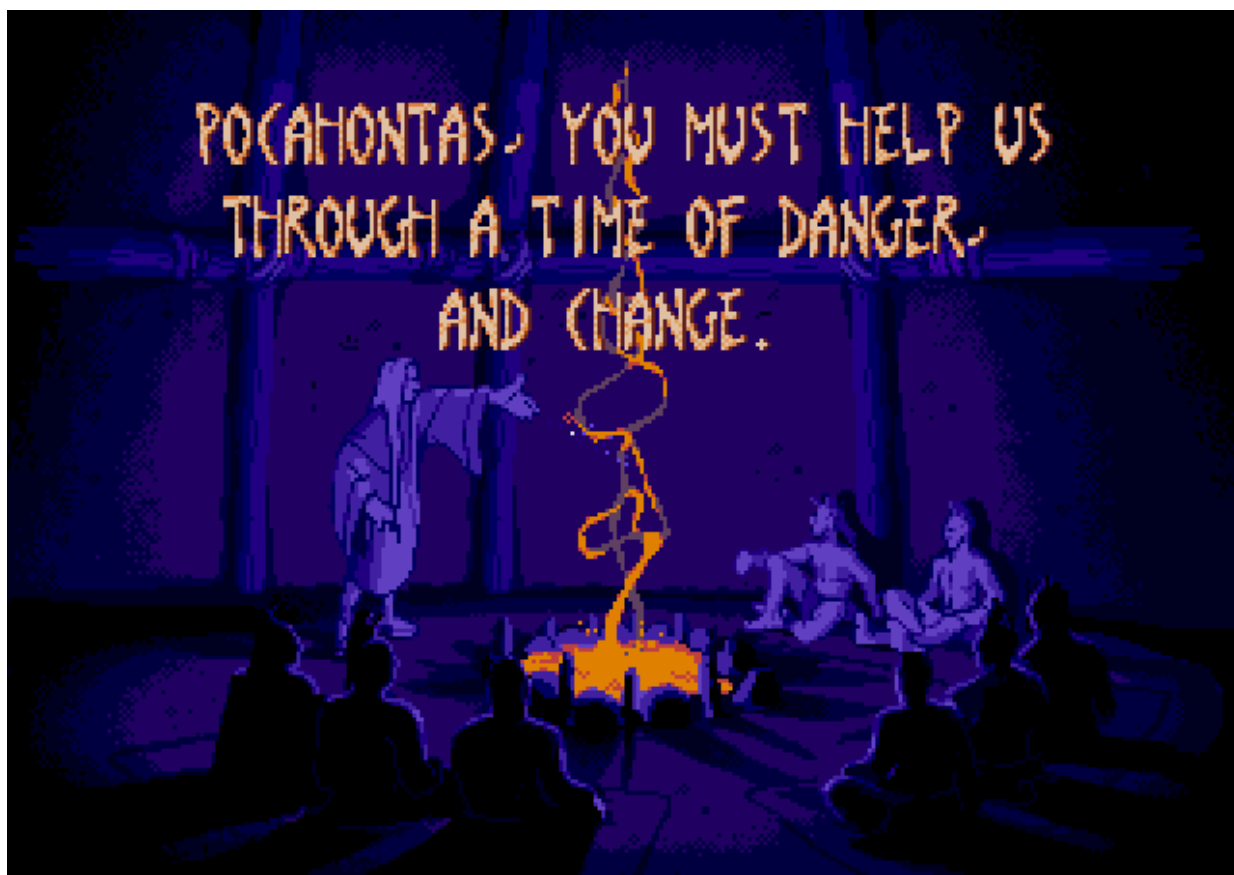
Whilst unexpectedly true of the game (also available for Nintendo's handheld thingy), one key character from the

movie - Powhatan warrior, Kocoum - *does, in fact*, bite the bullet. Almost literally you could say; he comes to a sticky end thanks to a blast from the matchlock musket of Smith's friend, Thomas (played by Christian Bale).

In contrast, the game (a joint effort between Funcom and Disney Interactive) turns its back on violence entirely, out-Disneying even Disney itself. It's not that kind of title, despite the feature-length cartoon revolving around white man's callous subjugation of the indigenous Indian population of America. Even if you haven't studied history since your school days, you'll know that involved a fair bit of bloodshed and self-righteous plundering.

"This won't satisfy your bloodlust, but if you're looking for something more cerebral than Pocahontas has got more to offer than just a great pair of legs."

**Mean Machines (85%, October 1996)**



There's no reason it *shouldn't* be impressive given the extent of the talented human resources and time frame allocated. Released almost exactly a year behind the movie, in June 1996, it certainly wouldn't have been a rushed affair. Still, "Pocahontas SNES was cancelled due to short-sighted production decisions" according to lead programmer of the Genesis original, Carl-Hendrik Skarstedt (refer to his interview with SEGA-16). It's interesting to note as an aside that Carl's career was built upon the foundations of his experiences in the C64 and Amiga demo scene. He's a coder with true pedigree!

Speaking to SNES Central, Carl goes onto explain that the Nintendo port failed to materialise as a result of stunted progress. Primarily this was attributable to the lack of a distinct, designated development team.



I'd draw attention to the other developers involved to give them due credit, except I wouldn't know where to start. It's a list as long as the phone book!



Colonialism backdrops the story, whilst its real focus rests upon the blossoming relationship that develops between the captain of the invading English settlers, John Smith (played by Australian, Mel Gibson), and a native American woman known as Pocahontas (voiced by Alaskan, Irene Bedard).



This marked the first depiction of an interracial romance in a Disney cartoon, albeit one for which Irene and Mel recorded their parts separately and still haven't met one another. None of it really matters because it's cobbles.



In the true story on which Disney's fairy tale is based, Pocahontas is actually the nickname of the star and she was only around ten years old when the pair first met. Too young to be thinking of relationships with 27-year-old men or marriage, arranged or otherwise. At least according to our contemporary western sensibilities.



Also, Matoaka (Pocahontas' birth name) died at the age of 21, possibly as a result of contracting pneumonia, smallpox, or tuberculosis, or ingesting poison. No-one knows for sure. This was 1617 so history is a bit sketchy. She could even have been struck down by tattoo ink poisoning. If Pocahontas was to be a historically accurate representation of her namesake, she would actually be topless and covered in body art. I wouldn't like to be the one to run that by the classification board.

In the cartoon, the ages of the two lovers are drawn closer to a range deemed more acceptable, and they are transformed into princess and prince supermodel caricatures. Because who could buy into a love story if both sides of the equation weren't impossibly beautiful and therefore worthy of affection? Ugh! It's this kind of superficial fluff that leads

people to develop eating disorders or cut themselves to relieve their self-loathing. Nice work Disney.

John Smith and his fellow colonialists, led by the cutthroat Governor Ratcliffe, descend upon Virginia with a view to slaughtering the heathen 'savages' and pilfering their (non-existent) gold. They should have checked out Wikipedia before setting sail.



Governor Ratcliffe: Gentlemen, to work! You men, get the ship unloaded. You men, build the fort. The rest of you, break up the shovels. It's time to start digging.

Ben, Lon: (both) Digging?

Governor Ratcliffe: Why, of course. Let's not forget what the Spanish found when they came to the New World. Gold! Mountains of it. Why, for years they've been

ravaging the New World of its most precious resources.  
But now it's our turn.



It's beyond me why people laugh at this bit as if *digging* for gold is somehow a preposterous notion. Stupid Disney should have done their research; everyone knows you hack away at rock with a pickaxe! You *mine* for gold! Well, actually you can dig, pan, mine or even hand over money to a jeweller in exchange for the precious metal. It might have made Ratcliffe look more of a buffoon had he intended to catch it by sweeping a butterfly net through the air.





Governor Ratcliffe: Wiggins, why do you think those insolent heathens attacked us?

Wiggins: Because we invaded their land and cut down their trees and dug up their earth?

Governor Ratcliffe: It's the gold! They have it and they don't want us to take it from them. Well, I'll just have to take it by force then, won't I?



Luckily Captain Smith isn't cut from the same cloth. Mesmerised by Pocahontas' exquisite charm and wisdom, John's prejudices are challenged, forcing him to question the logic of castigating whole races of people based on nothing more than their heritage and way of life.

John Smith: We've improved the lives of savages all over the world.

Pocahontas: Savages?

John Smith: Uh, not that you're a savage.

Pocahontas: Just my people!

John Smith: No. Listen. That's not what I meant. Let me explain.

Pocahontas: Let go!



John Smith: No, I'm not letting you leave.

Pocahontas: (jumps out of her canoe and climbs up into a tree)



John Smith: Look, don't do this. Savage is just a word, uh, you know. A term for people who are uncivilized.

Pocahontas: Like me.

John Smith: Well, when I say uncivilized, what I mean is, is.

(he grabs a branch, but the branch is not strong enough to hold his weight, and John falls back to the ground.  
Pocahontas jumps down after him)

Pocahontas: What you mean is, not like you.



After the death of Kocoum, John is taken hostage by the native American tribe, inciting his party to attempt a daring 'just in the nick of time' rescue before he can be executed.

Pocahontas: (as she throws herself over John Smith, who is about to be executed) No!

(silence)



Pocahontas: If you kill him, you'll have to kill me, too.

Powhatan: Daughter, stand back.

Pocahontas: I won't! I love him, Father.

(silence)

Pocahontas: Look around you. This is where the path of hatred has brought us.

(brief silence)

Pocahontas: This is the path I choose, Father. What will yours be?



By the time they clash, John has come to his senses so leaps to the defence of Pocahontas' father, Chief Powhatan, taking a bullet on his behalf. A pivotal turn of events that rallies the colonists against Ratcliffe, halting the war and bringing the two sides together to negotiate a truce.



Governor Ratcliffe: (taken away in chains, muffled) How dare you! Untie me at once! I'll have your heads for this!

Wiggins: (tearfully) And he came so highly recommended.

(sighs sadly)



Following Pocahontas' admirable example, even Meeko the racoon and Percy pug reach common ground, heart-warmingly learning to embrace their differences.





Powhatan: My daughter speaks with the wisdom beyond her years. We've all come here with anger in our hearts, but she comes with courage and understanding. From this day forward, if there is to be more killing, it will not start with me.



John survives and is sent back to England to recuperate whilst Pocahontas decides that her place is with her family. It's all fine and dandy because they'll live on in each other's hearts no matter their logistical distance apart.

John Smith: Pocahontas.

Pocahontas: (hugs him) I'm so sorry.

John Smith: For what? This? I've gotten out of worse scrapes than this. Can't think of anything right now, but.

Pocahontas: (tearfully) It would've been better if we never met. None of this would've happened.

John Smith: Pocahontas, look at me. I'd rather die tomorrow than live a hundred years without knowing you.

Nakoma: Pocahontas?



Pocahontas: I can't leave you.

John Smith: You never will. No matter what happens to me, I'll always be with you, forever.

Pocahontas: (sadly leaves)



In between, the bulk of the runtime is preoccupied with standing on cliff ledges looking vacantly wistful and demonstrating that Pocahontas exists at one with nature, having relinquished control of her physical being to the mystical fluffiness of indefinable spiritual essence.



From the standpoint of this being superior to science, logic and rational thought, Disney, by way of Pocahontas, teach us and John that not everything in life can be deduced merely through utilitarian perception. "Listen to your heart" and anything is possible. Learning to communicate in a language you have never previously heard or uttered is just the beginning.



Grandmother Willow: Now then, there's something I want to show you. Look.

(dips her vine in the water in which glowing ripples begin to form)

Pocahontas: The ripples.

John Smith: What about them?

Grandmother Willow: So small at first, then look how they grow. But someone has to start them.



It's all a bit airy-fairy and farfetched, though since this is the 'positively' racist stereotype westerners and Disney execs tend to embrace with regards to native American culture, that's what we run with.



Hence in the movie, we see Pocahontas calling upon her mutually dependent relationships with wildlife as well as the supernatural world beyond.



Even the 'pets' have pets, Flit the hummingbird and Meeko injecting welcome relief from all the preachy lectures delivered by the human cast. They contribute similar lessons, of course, they're just imparted via gestures instead. In the corresponding game, Meeko, as noted, is a playable character, while Flit is a NPC assistant.





Yes, anthropomorphised animals are naturally present and correct, as well as a sagely, talking willow tree. A grandmother apparently. Obviously, the former can't speak, that would just be insane.



John Smith: Pocahontas, that tree is talking to me.

Pocahontas: Then you should talk back.

Grandmother Willow: Don't be frightened, young man.  
My bark is worse than my bite.

Pocahontas: Say something.

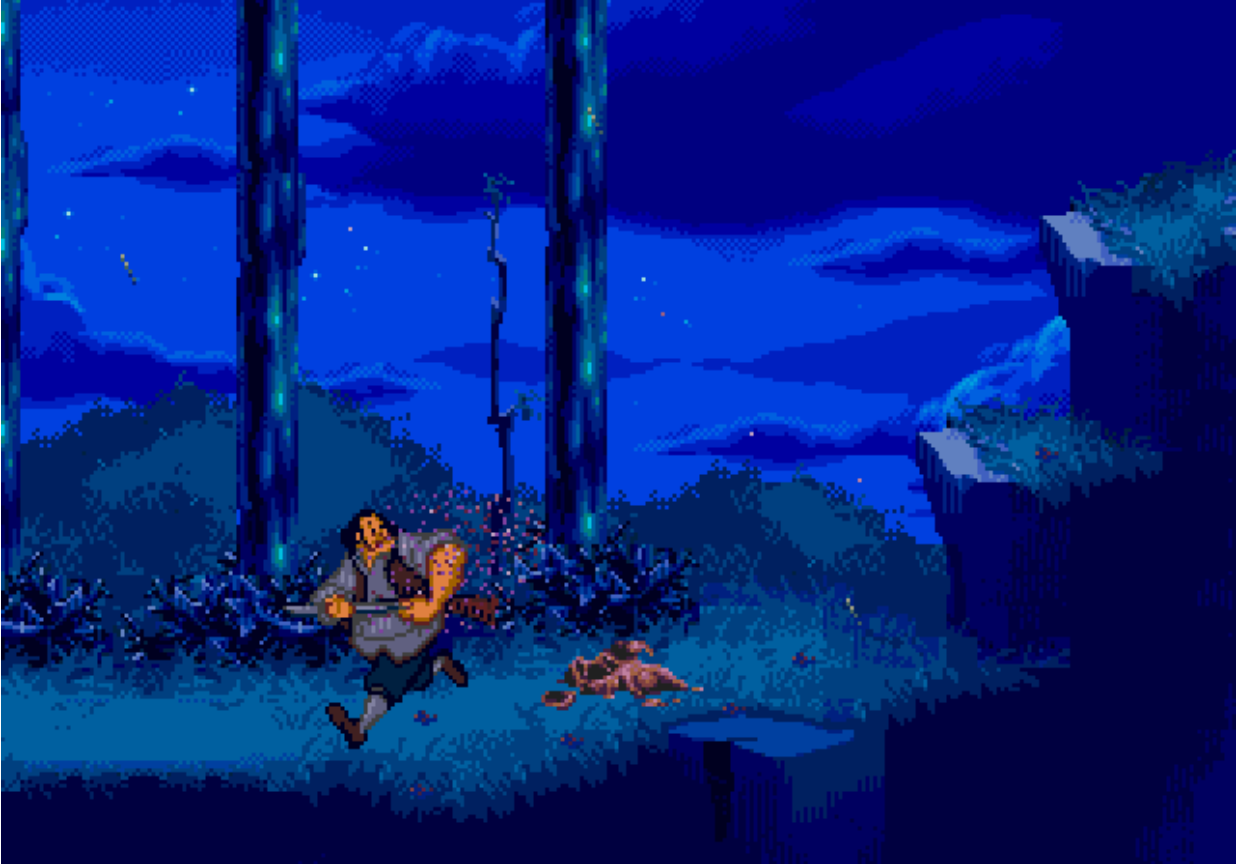
John Smith: What do you say to a tree?



Pocahontas: Anything you want.



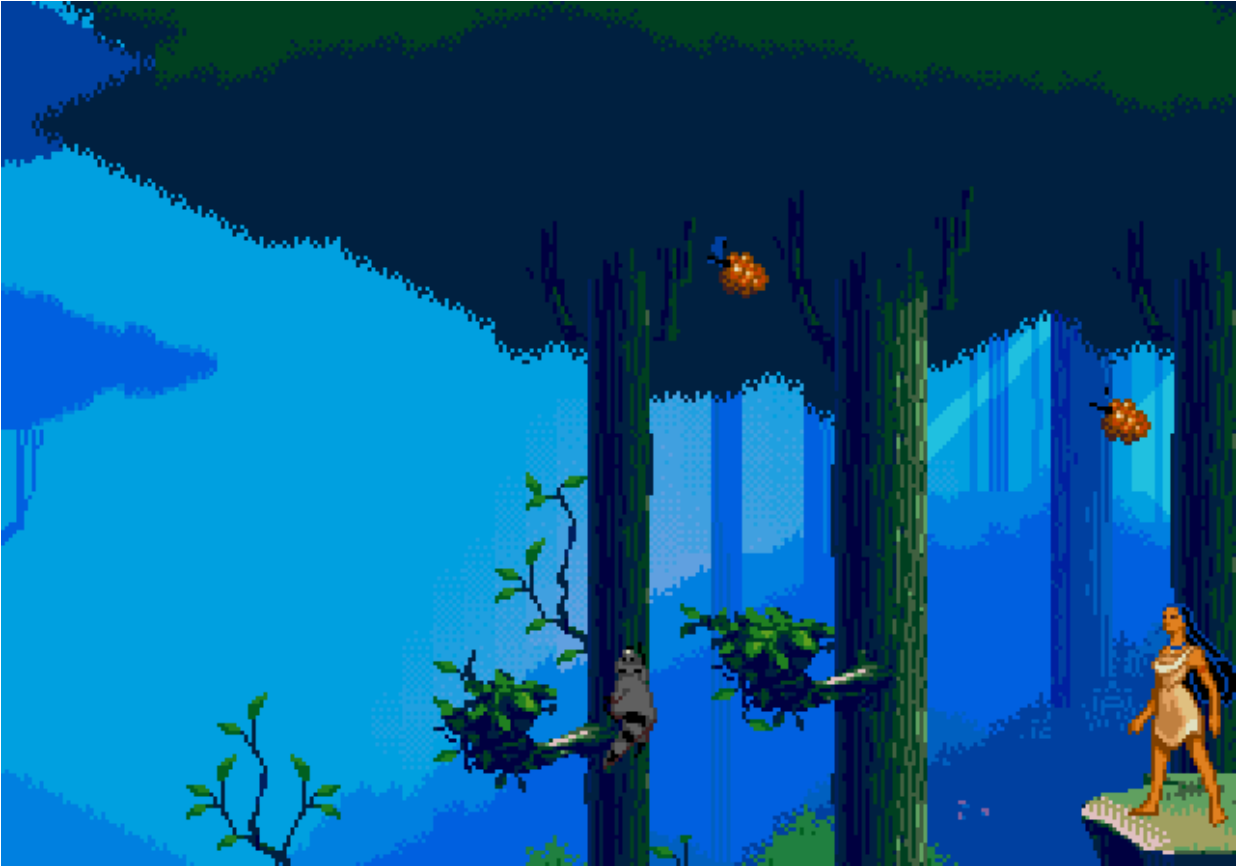
Collaboration constitutes the *nature* of the game too. It's an action-adventure of sorts unlike most you've ever played before.



Appropriately it reminds me of *Another World*, only without all the sudden death scenarios that serve to heighten its tense, foreboding atmosphere. That aside, once you've spotted the swathes of blue landscapes that constitute the North American region, Tsenacommah, it's impossible to disassociate them from Delphine's break away from predictable platforming.

"With *Pocahontas* being a movie translation that leans more toward the younger gamer, I was expecting to breeze right through this title. Instead, I found the difficulty of the puzzles to be just right. One of the best features is the teamwork you have to use between the characters in order to solve the puzzles. Without this strategy element, the game would have had little to offer. This one's a worthwhile title, but is lacking when it comes to the sound and the control."

## Electronic Gaming Monthly (70%, March 1996)



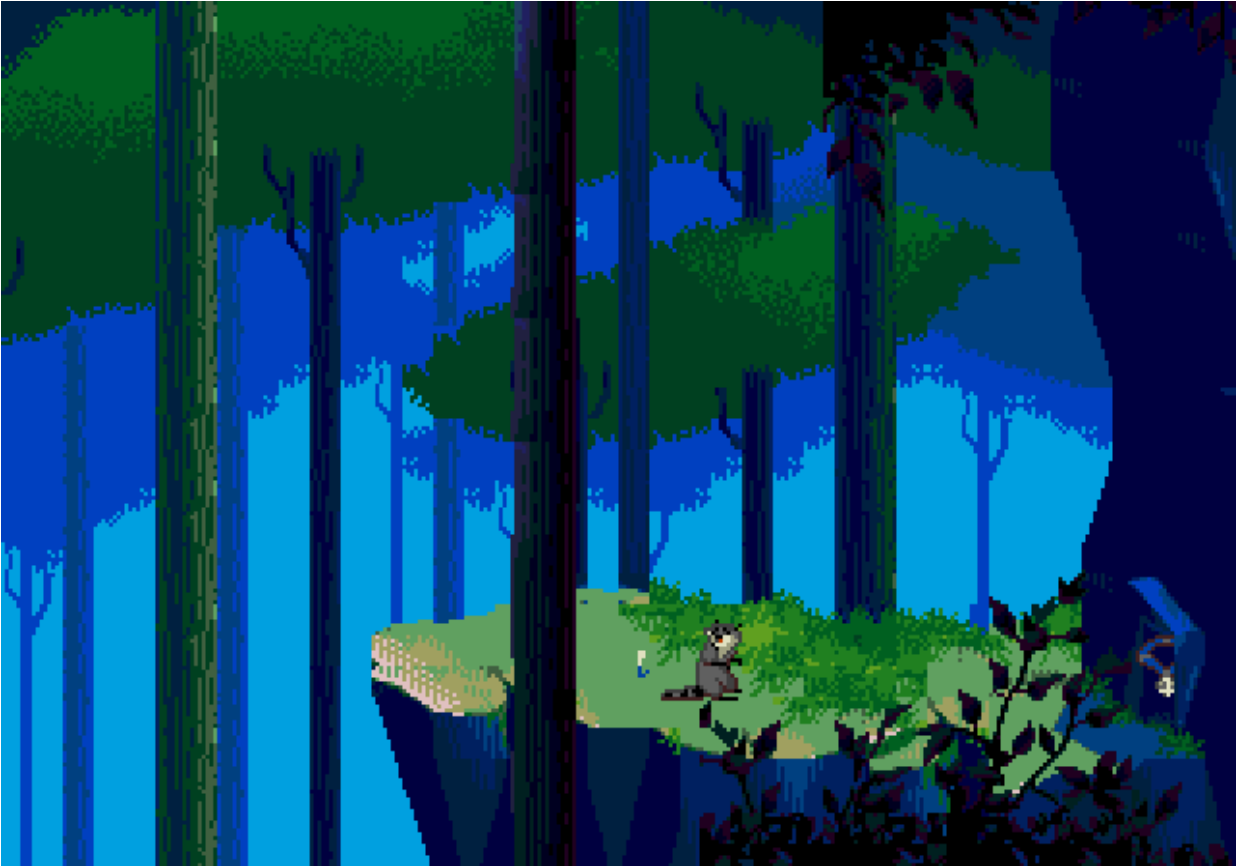
As in the movie, Pocahontas is assisted by her endearingly precocious pet racoon, Meeko, and together they must support one another in progressing through various puzzle predicaments. Originally John Candy was to fulfil this role, though as a talking turkey named 'Redfeather'. Then he had the discourtesy to go and die from a heart attack, resulting in his recorded dialogue being discarded and the character retired.



Each blessed with idiosyncratic capabilities and weaknesses, Pocahontas is able to achieve objectives that Meeko can't, and vice versa. Switching between them at will allows us to capitalise on both sets of attributes for reciprocal benefit, though teamwork comes into play whenever a riddle presents that can only be solved through cooperative interaction.



For instance, using Pocahontas' folded arms as a launchpad for Meeko, who subsequently clambers up to a cliff ledge towering above to scamper through a tight gap too small even for dainty Disney princesses. There Meeko might find himself in a position to push a boulder over the edge to elevate Pocahontas to a height that enables her to join her tag team partner. On other occasions seesaws are employed to spring Meeko aloft, transforming him into the black and white, oversized equivalent of a flying squirrel.



*Collect all five necklaces and we're rewarded by way of an extended animated finale sequence. You'll find this tacked onto the end of one of the longplays on YouTube.*



Think of it as a two-player game, both controlled by you, sequentially. A radical switch away from traditional, often mindless, platform-pounding and head-mashing, though not entirely unique. Bubba and Stix offers similarly 'alternative' mechanics, for example.

"Animation fans and younger players will love this gentle, slow-moving game. Lithe Pocahontas walks and swims through gorgeous pastoral settings, helping her animal friends and absorbing their powers. Easy puzzles provide the challenge, but gameplay is not as exuberant as Disney's Aladdin. Pocahontas is good Disney fun for novices."

**GamePro (70%, May 1996)**



On multiple occasions, we encounter a dilemma that neither Pocahontas or Meeko have the aptitude to overcome. At these points we must look to the wider environment for support. By performing a virtuous deed for another resident of the forest, we're rewarded with the ability to adopt their forte - whatever trait makes them exceptionally well-adapted to their habitat - allowing us to progress to the next stage.

There are nine animals in total that require our assistance to achieve one goal or another. Sometimes this entails liberating them from accidental captivity, elsewhere unblocking their route. Release the deer's antlers from a thicket and we magically osmose its spirit, causing Pocahontas to run faster and jump further. Clear an obstructed stream for the otters by shunting aside a boulder and we can join them in their aquatic ecosystem, diving and swimming like a pro.







Race the wolf and we're enhanced with an ability to 'sneak', a technique that will come into play when called upon to navigate around guarding colonialists without being detected. I think I'd prefer to join Kev and *dance* with the wolves. ;)







Synergy with fish results in us swimming faster, playing nicely with squirrels leads to tree-climbing shenanigans, whilst night vision is gifted by grateful owls.



Returning a wayward chick to its nest permits Pocahontas to fall long distances without incurring injury, though it's not until we encounter a destitute grizzly bear that we really broach superhero territory; snarl at the more timid members of the colonialist posse and they run away like sissies terrified of native American catwalk models. What a strange analogy to pluck out of thin air.

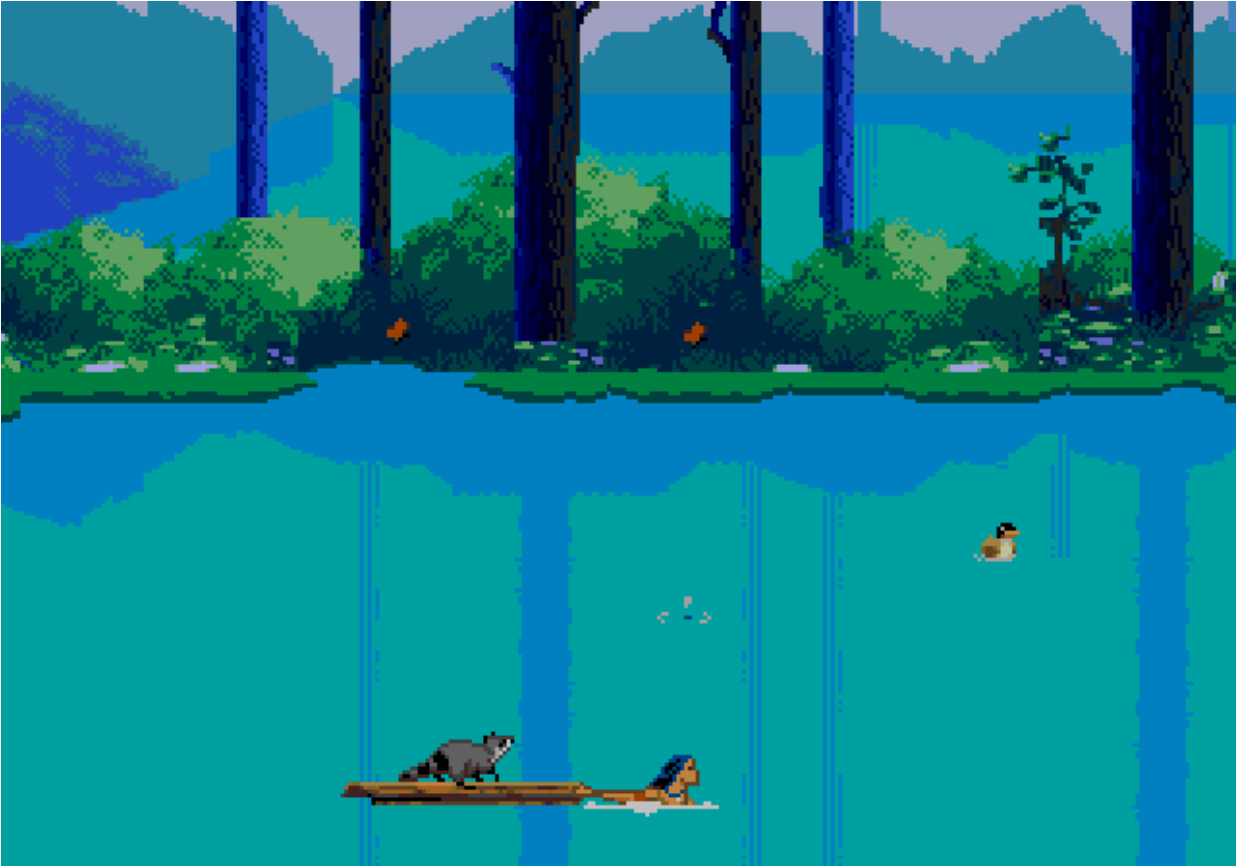




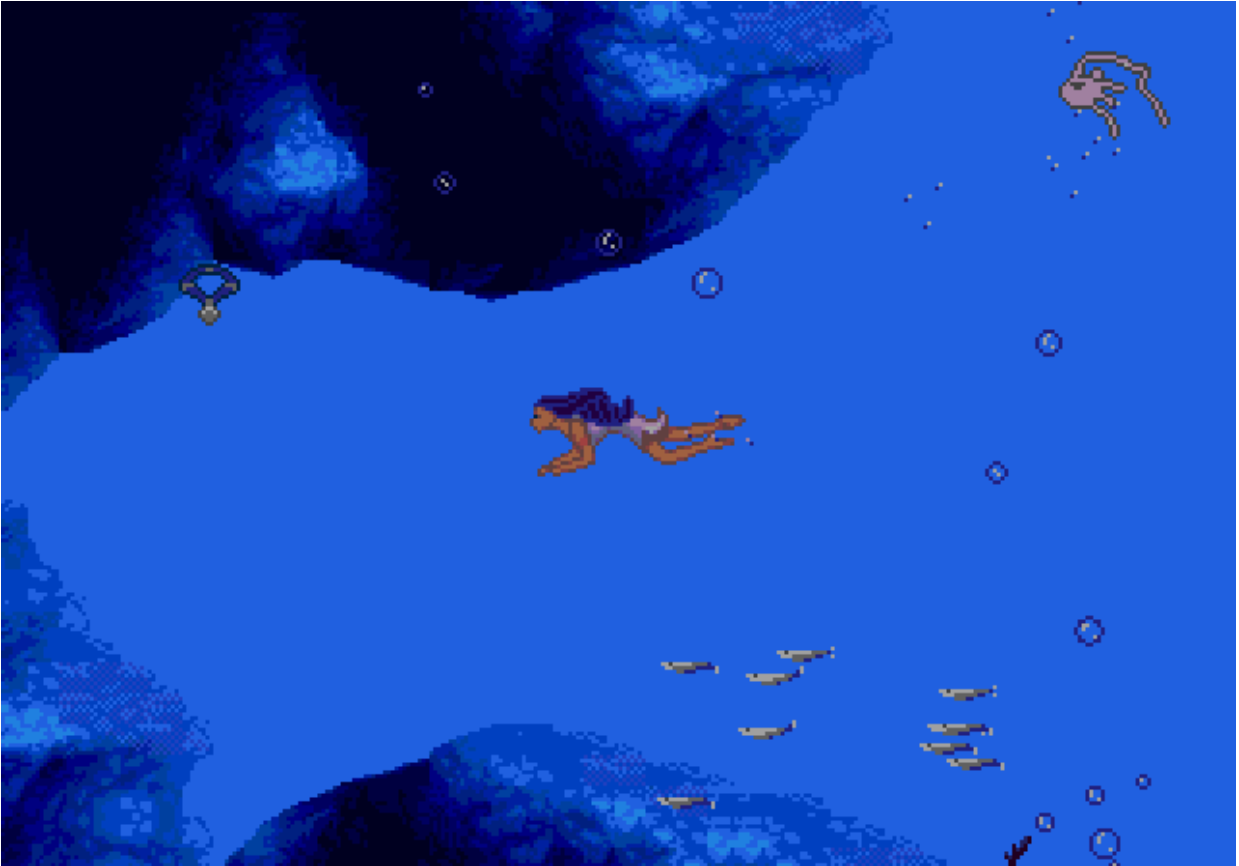
Whatever we achieve (credit is always attributed by way of an animal head icon), the idea is to keep the dynamic duo in close proximity since you never know when you'll need assistance.



Meeko can't swim, which is why dragging a floating log across the surface of great expanses of water is a useful technique to discover. Once safely across, Meeko might have the opportunity to return the favour, smoothing Pocahontas' path.



Beneath the surface, the game becomes more akin to Little Mermaid or Ecco the Dolphin, Pocahontas gliding through crystal clear paradise as gracefully as any of its helpful natural inhabitants. Even without Meeko, Pocahontas never has to fly solo. Doesn't it swell the cockles of your warm, cosy heart?



Such puzzles are unlikely to leave you with a furrowed brow for too long, and yet a hints option has been implemented to offer pointers for very young players who are struggling to decide how to proceed.



A simple password system, serving as a substitute save game feature, makes it even less likely that you'll give up without resolving Pocahontas' plight. Along with each cutscene reached, a new password is delivered, ensuring that we're never too far from a restart point. Not that we're ever under threat of dying, unlike our movie counterpart who could be 'bulldozed' at any point to clear the way to build houses and other trappings of 'civilisation'.





"Despite its brevity and lack of real challenge, Pocahontas is a worthwhile purchase for anyone who's a fan of the film. The game has been constructed with a craftsman's attention to the finest details and although there could have been a few more gameplay elements added (such as a scene where Meeko has to go around collecting as many of John Smith's proffered biscuits as he can stuff into his mouth - a truly humorous bit in the movie) there's still enough in here to interest even the most callous gamer.

If, for some reason, you couldn't stand or weren't interested in the movie, then by all means, stay far away from this, too. Younger kids should get a kick out of Pocahontas but don't be surprised if they finish and shelve it a lot sooner than you'd like them to. As for me, I'm just going to sit here, try not to feel guilty and twiddle my thumbs until Disney's Hunchback of Notre Dame comes out for the 32-bit systems."

**Electric Playground (70%, May 1996)**



All our actions throughout the game culminate in tracking down John and intervening in a skirmish to prevent an unholy war from breaking out between the two conflicting factions. This, in accord with much of the saga, occurs automatically. Our foremost challenge is plodding through nudging and poking everything and anything to see if it

achieves something beneficial. We win through sheer perseverance, the artistic spectacle hopefully holding our attention all the way to the finish line.

If anything does, it certainly won't be the less than captivating 18-minute soundtrack, which equates to a collection of limp, plinky-plonky flute-centric ditties repeated on a ten-second loop ad infinitum. Several tracks are so wearily similar they could be faded in and out without the player noticing the switch. You can't really blame Disney Interactive's musician. Patrick J Collins achieved a respectable facsimile of the movie's audio; one of the least inspiring arrangements to emerge from ye olde Mouse House to date. A major disappointment given that the cartoon moulded around it is a musical! And the track that won an Academy Award for best original song - 'Colours of the Wind' - isn't that a bit close to Charlie Landsborough's 'What Colour is the Wind?' released three years earlier? After swiping the concept and artistic design upon which Lion King was founded (refer to 'Kimba the White Lion'), we shouldn't be surprised if some borrowing was afoot.



Luckily, the visuals go a long way towards making amends, largely courtesy of Pocahontas' silky-smooth, fluid, geometric sprite animation, attributable to the rotoscoping technique. In harmony, backdrops are similarly illustrated to a standard worthy of the esteemed Disney name. Although I have to say, I've seen more aesthetically appealing games on the Amiga, created by much smaller teams. Sometimes by a sole graphician. Pocahontas is imbued with a certain elementary stylistic chic that buys it a pass. I don't know, maybe it's the magic of shamanism?



Foreground objects lend a sense depth, convincing weather effects augmenting the environments' capacity to draw us into the make-believe fantasy. A fitting tribute to the original artists who benefitted from a share of the \$55m budget and a production schedule stretching to five years. Released any sooner and the movie would be too premature to mark the 400th anniversary of the real Pocahontas, so arriving in June 1995 worked out OK in the end.

"Graphics are solid, but nowhere near as nice as other games like Aladdin or the Jungle Book. Backgrounds are surprisingly plain-looking with hardly any animation and little color.

Pocahontas and Meeko are well animated, but the control is slightly off. At times Pocahontas won't want to run or she doesn't always jump when you hit the button. If the

game were an intense platformer, this would be very serious, but the game moves at a leisurely pace and you can't die. So the control is just a minor nuisance.

As it stands, Pocahontas is a perfect game to get for little fans of the movie as their very first video game. While there are games that offer more play value, not many can say they're completely non-violent and designed for young animal lovers."

### **All Game Guide (60%, 1998)**

If you can adjust to the clunky, imprecise control method and hang up your uzi long enough to appreciate something slightly off the beaten track, Pocahontas has a fair bit to offer. Not just one for the girls, but anyone seeking an *experience* rather than a hardcore, kaleidoscopic assault on the senses.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that people looking to take offence over race relations issues manage to find 'just' cause in Pocahontas. It doesn't say for a second 'Injuns' are different from the white super race and are therefore evil. *Governor Ratcliffe* decrees that, right before being systematically reviled and proved a mistaken bigot by Disney's morally upstanding PC brigade. They depict Ratcliffe as so thoroughly reprehensible that in the original theatre release several of his more controversial, racially-oriented lyrics were censored from his 'Savages' track.





Governor Ratcliffe: Lies! Lies, all of it! Murderous thieves. There's not room for their kind of civilized society!

John Smith: But this is their land!

Governor Ratcliffe: This is my land! I make the laws here! And I say anyone who so much as look at an Indian without killing him on sight, will be tried for treason and hanged!



Not that the indigenous American Indian population were any more tolerant or open-minded. Once the hornet's nest had been irrevocably poked, they were more inclined to "destroy those white demons" than prance through the golden cornfields holding hands and gazing adoringly into each others' eyes.

(singing) Powhatan: This is what we feared. The paleface is a demon / The only thing they feel at all is greed.

Kekata: Beneath that milky hide, there's emptiness inside.

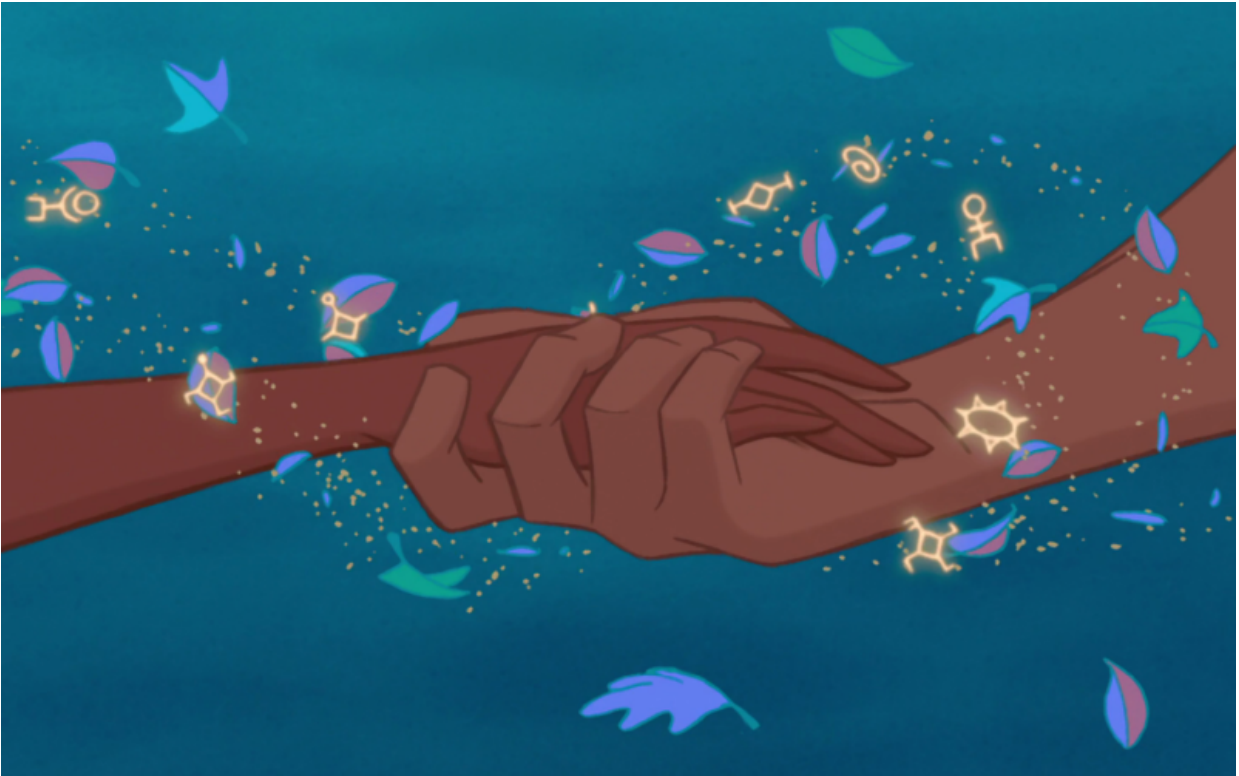
Warriors: I wonder if they even bleed.

Warriors: (all) They're savages, savages, barely even human. Savages, savages.

Powhatan: Killers at the core.

Kekata: They're different from us, which means they can't be trusted.

Powhatan: We must sound the drums of war!



Attempting to instil such a lesson in impressionable viewers is commendable, although it's one so redundant and patronising it shouldn't need to be stated for anyone over the age of 10 years old.

As such, Pocahontas was never going to be one of those treasured Disney classics that appeal to adults as much as kids. In fact, it ranks way down the list of favourite Disney movies generally, judging by its global box office earnings. \$347.1m pegs it at no. 81, taking both live-action and animated films into account.

A dreary, predictable fairy tale romantic epic at heart with zero comic relief to break the preachy tension, whatever it's

called is supremely bland, instantly forgettable and hasn't the faintest clue who its intended audience is.